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ABSTRACT

A survey of 406 elementary, middle and secondary school teachers attending the 1973 summer session at Northern Illinois University was conducted to determine their familiarity with and exposure to behavioral objectives, their involvement in writing and using behavioral objectives, and their opinion of the effect of behavioral objectives on student performance. The results of the survey show a high incidence of familiarity with behavioral objectives among educators at all levels of the educational establishment and a high incidence of involvement in the writing and use of behavioral objectives. There was a strong element of indecisiveness on the part of the subjects with regard to the influence of behavioral objectives on pupil performance; however, the majority viewed behavioral objectives as useful in the educational process. (Author/HMD)

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TEACHERS AND BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

Introduction

A simple definition of a behavioral objective is that it is an objective stated in behavioral terms so that its achievement is measurable. The simplicity of this definition, however, does not catch the effect of the introduction of behavioral objectives in the school setting and the discussion that has surrounded their implementation.

The advent of behavioral objectives in the schools is the direct result of what has come to be called the "age of accountability" in education - an effort to systematize and categorize the learning experiences of the school is such a way as to increase their measurability and thus account for their effectiveness. This is all, of course, ultimately related to the financial support of education and to a general feeling that by making the learning experiences more efficient you will make the schools more effective.

Schools have always had objectives but they have been too general and vague to provide the direction thought necessary and thus the emergence of behavioral objectives. Their introduction into the established patterns of the schools has not been without reaction and to this day their acceptance is by no means complete. Yet it would seem that the very act of introducing them has had an effect. What that effect is or will be can not be completely ascertained at this time. However, one way of determining what the possibilities are in this regard is to find out how educators view behavioral objectives; more specifically, their familarity and exposure to them, their involvement in writing and using them, and their opinion of their effect on pupil performance and general usefulness in the educative process. To answer these questions a survey was taken of 406 educators attending the 1973 summer session at Northern Illinois University. These educators were teachers and administrators in the elementary, middle, and secondary schools located primarily

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in the northern part of Illinois which is one of the fastest growing population areas of the country. In a population somewhat more male (226) than female (180) the breakdown by position was 111 elementary school teachers (kindergarten through fifth grade), 93 middle school teachers (grades six, seven, and eight), 151 secondary school teachers (nine through twelve) of which 56 taught English and social studies, 39 mathematics and science, and 56 were teachers of language, art, industrial arts, home economics, business and physical education. Forty-nine of the educators surveyed were in some sort of administrative position in the schools. In terms of teaching experience they were a relatively young group. Two-hundred eighty-two had taught five or less years, 83 had taught six to ten years, 31 had taught eleven to twenty years, and only six indicated over twenty years of teaching experience. The highest degree held by the majority (almost sixty-nine per cent) was either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science in Education. Seventeen per cent held the Master of Arts or Master of Science in Education degrees.

The limitations of this survey are obvious. The sample is not randomized and, therefore, cannot be said to be totally representative of all educator opinion on this subject. It is, however, a fairly large sample with a fairly even distribution by position in a population area of significance in this country and this lends credence to its results.

Findings

Table I shows that there is a high incidence of familarity with behavioral objectives among educators with almost ninety six per cent indicating such. Their exposure to behavioral objectives has been primarily through their class work in

TABLE I
EDUCATOR FAMILIARITY WITH BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

	N	%
Yes	389	95.8
No	11	2.7
No Response	6	1.4
	406	100.0

college; Yet, Table II shows that a sizable minority have encountered them in the school setting. This reflects, of course, the general heightened interest on the

TABLE II
EDUCATOR EXPOSURE TO BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

Class	281	69.2
School	77	19.0
Workshop	20	4.9
Other	11	2.7
No Response	17	4.2
	406	100.0

part of educational agencies, both state and local, in introducing school faculties to what they perceive to be a technique for the improvement of instruction in the schools. The extent to which teachers are involved in writing and using behavioral objectives would, of course, be something of an indication of the effect that this exposure has had. Table III shows that better than ninety per cent of the respondents have written them and used them to varying degrees. The extent, however, to which they felt that they have had a noticeable effect on

TABLE III
EDUCATOR INVOLVEMENT IN WRITING AND USE OF BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

	Writing		Use	
	N	%	N	%
Many	106	26.1	77	19.0
Some	201	49.5	196	48.3
Little	62	15.3	84	20.7
None	32	7.9	43	10.5
No Response	5	1.2	6	1.5
	406	100.0	406	100.0

pupil performance is not as clear cut. Table IV shows that a near majority of the responses fall within the "no" and "undecided" categories with indecision

TABLE IV
EDUCATOR OPINION OF THE EFFECT (noticeable)
OF BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES ON PUPIL PERFORMANCE

	N	%
Yes	156	38.4
No	64	15.8
Undecided	138	34.0
No Response	48	11.8
	406	100.0

predominate. Clearly, writing and use must ultimately show some significant results insofar as educators are concerned if the additional effort is to be justified. Yet, Table V shows that a solid majority, seventy-two per cent, saw behavioral objectives as useful in the educative process with only twenty two per cent viewing them as restrictive.

TABLE V
EDUCATOR VIEW OF THE USEFULNESS
OF BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES WITHIN THE
EDUCATIVE PROCESS

	N	%
Useful	293	72.2
Restrictive	89	21.9
Harmful	1	0.2
No Response	23	5.7
	406	100.0

The comments made by the educators in the section provided for them in the survey provides additional insight into the attitudes held concerning behavioral objectives. Since the survey dealt with other aspects of learning and behavior besides behavioral objectives (i.e. operant conditioning and behavior modification) the comments made by the respondents were within a broader context and, therefore, may not reflect a mental set specific to behavioral objectives. Seventeen of the 406 educators, however, did refer to behavioral objectives specifically. The unfavorable comments out-numbered the favorable ones twelve to five. There are,

of course, two cautions in any cataloging of comments on any issue. One is that comments are normally made by those who feel intensely about the issue (usually anti) and the other is that in reporting them they tend to distort the totality of responses as derived from the total population of the study. With these cautions in mind, a selected sample of both unfavorable and favorable comments are noted. The unfavorable comments were:

"Behavioral objectives are a waste of valuable teacher time."

"Operant conditioning and behavioral objectives both tend to dehumanize students."

"Behavioral objectives are subject oriented and of little value in the affective domain."

"Behavioral objectives, from what I have read and seen, force a lot of inflexibility on the teacher. They can kill creativeness."

"Behavioral objectives can be harmful if teachers do not understand them and, therefore, restrictive."

"I predict behavioral objectives will be out of use in five years if not sooner."

The more favorable comments were:

"The use of operant conditioning, behavioral modification and behavioral objectives are all valuable educational principles when used in the proper circumstances and with full understanding of the instructor."

"I feel behavioral objectives are useful but may be threatening to the teacher and child if carried out of proportion, they should be program oriented and not used as accountability criteria."

"Behavioral objectives may sometimes seem restrictive because of the specific nature they require. It is, however, easier to evaluate performance according to them and they are useful. I think they make the teacher really decide what she wants for a particular child."

Summary Statement

This survey shows a high incidence of familiarity with behavioral objectives among educators at all levels of the educational establishment gained primarily through classroom work in college with some exposure in the school setting. It also shows a high incidence of involvement in the writing and use of behavioral

objectives. There was a strong element of indecisiveness on the part of these educators with regard to the influence of behavioral objectives on pupil performance; however, the majority viewed behavioral objectives as useful in the educative process.

Concluding Commentary

Behavioral objectives have a future in the educative process if they can be shown to meet one fundamental criterion: Their use must result in an appreciable gain in student performance over and above that which can be attributed to other approaches.

The simple introduction of behavioral objectives into the existing patterns of instruction is not sufficient and will ultimately spell their doom as viable approaches in the learning transaction. If behavioral objectives are to have significant acceptance and impact in the schools they must be viewed in a new teaching paradigm. This means a basic change in the attitudes and methodologies which maintain and support prevailing instructional models.

The majority of the educators in this survey did not reject behavioral objectives. In fact, they saw them as useful but were indecisive with regard to their effectiveness insofar as pupil performance is concerned. They appear to be at a choice point between acceptance and rejection. Therefore, the massive infusion of behavioral objectives into all aspects of the educative process without commensurate evidence of results may create a backlash against their use under any circumstance. It would be more appropriate to develop pilot projects at the local level (i.e. action research) which involve the teacher and the researcher together seeking the best means for introducing behavioral objectives into the learning experiences of the students. This research should not only be aimed at the development and use of behavioral objectives in the respective subject matter areas of the

school but it should also take into account the total instructional model to determine if other than the traditional model might not be more appropriate and effective. Otherwise, as a junior high school social studies teacher commented in the survey, "I predict behavioral objectives will be out of use in five years if not sooner."

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